



# County of San Mateo

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

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**Department:** BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
**DISTRICT 1**  
**File #:** 23-884

Board Meeting Date: 10/24/2023

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**Special Notice / Hearing:** None  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**To:** Honorable Board of Supervisors  
**From:** Supervisor Dave Pine, District 1  
Supervisor Warren Slocum, District 4  
**Subject:** Study Session on Sheriff Office Oversight

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Receive report, presentations, and public comment on Sheriff Office Oversight, and provide direction to staff.

**BACKGROUND:**

The San Mateo County Sheriff's Office operates the County jails and provides police services in unincorporated areas, as well as, pursuant to contract, several cities and towns within the County. In conjunction with the Attorney General, the Board of Supervisors (Board) supervises the Sheriff, though the Board cannot interfere with the Sheriff's constitutionally-mandated law enforcement functions.

In recent years, community voice, transparency, and accountability have emerged as central themes in conversations between communities and law enforcement. In 2020, the California Legislature passed Assembly Bill 1185, authorizing counties to create civilian oversight boards, offices of inspector general, or both to assist with Sheriff oversight. The law does not require the creation of an oversight board or office of the inspector general, nor does it mandate the use of any particular oversight model.

On September 13, 2022, Supervisors Dave Pine and Warren Slocum were appointed to an ad-hoc subcommittee to consider Sheriff's Office oversight.

On November 1, 2022, the Board held a study session on the topic and received a report on the counties that had, to that point, implemented some form of oversight body. (At that time, there were seven such counties; now there are nine.) Most such bodies were relatively recent creations of large urban counties, making it difficult to assess whether such models would be useful or effective in our County. At the study session, the Board also reviewed an oversight model proposed by a community group (Fixin' San Mateo County) that included a civilian oversight board and inspector general, both

with subpoena powers and jail access. Fixin' San Mateo County's proposal also contemplates a \$3 million annual budget for the oversight model.

After discussion, the Board provided the subcommittee direction to continue its work and develop a proposal that includes an inspector general and civilian board.

## **DISCUSSION:**

Since the November 2022 study session, the Subcommittee has focused on reviewing oversight and engagement models that promote public safety. To do this, the subcommittee reviewed existing models, met with experts and representatives of community organizations, commissioned research into community-police relations, and reviewed new State-level law enforcement reform legislation. The subcommittee also met with Sheriff Christina Corpus, who had not yet taken office at the time of the November 2022 study session, to learn about new initiatives undertaken by her Office.

After extensive review, the subcommittee found that rigorous empirical research on the impact of oversight bodies and the relative merits of different oversight models does not exist, that evidence regarding the effectiveness of local models is presently lacking, and that there is no agreed-upon best practice for oversight structure for all communities. Rather, the subcommittee's work indicates that each community should utilize an oversight model that best fits local needs.

The subcommittee further found that recent state legislation has significantly increased accountability and transparency around police practices, serious misconduct allegations, and critical incidents such as officer-involved shootings and in-custody deaths. It also learned that research shows community-police relations in San Mateo County are generally positive, with few residents reporting that they feel unsafe or lack trust in local law enforcement.

In assessing the need for and potential structure of a Sheriff Office oversight body, the subcommittee's work included, but was not limited to, the following:

- Retaining Stanford University's John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities to conduct independent research on local community views of community-police relations, with a particular focus on receiving input from traditionally underserved populations. Gardner Center collected and analyzed data gathered via multiple methods, such as community focus groups conducted in Spanish, Mandarin, and English; resident surveys; and attendance at Community Advisors for Responsible Engagement (CARE) meetings.
- Receiving information from the National Association of Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE), which advocates for and works to create community support for civilian oversight of law enforcement. NACOLE's work included a presentation regarding potential models of oversight, existing models in California, and related research.
- Meeting with Sheriff Christina Corpus (who had not yet taken office at the time of the November 2022 study session) and her command staff to learn about recent engagement and

transparency initiatives, including the CARE groups and an online transparency portal.

- Reviewing the existing legal and regulatory framework for oversight of the Sheriff's Office to establish a comprehensive understanding that incorporates new legislative reforms.
- Receiving information from representatives of various community organizations, local and national subject matter experts, and staff for other jurisdictions that have implemented forms of Sheriff's oversight and engagement.

The goal of the study session is to provide the Board with this important information related to Sheriff's Office oversight, transparency, accountability, and engagement, and provide direction to staff. Local and national experts, advocacy groups and law enforcement representatives have been invited to speak.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

None at this time.